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Austin Clarke to "My Dear James" (5 October 1962)

Austin Clarke

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answered 11/29/62

46 Asquith Avenue
Toronto 5, Ontario
Canada

Friday, October 5, 1962

My Dear James,

First let me tell you how pleased I am at your show of dignity and judgement during this very trying period for you in particular, and the entire black race. And I would like to tell you too, that my wife sends her regards and best wishes to you, and your family.

To introduce myself, let me say that I am a black West Indian who came here about seven years to go to school at the University of Toronto, which you might like to know is integrated officially, though not to the same extent, socially. I am a writer. I have not published anything substantial yet, but my first book in manuscript form has been accepted for publication, more or less definitely, and should be out sometime next year, early. I shall be getting a scholarship for travel and research soon, I hope, and that will enable me to come to the United States and other parts of the world, providing the money lasts. We have two children, daughters, one four and the other two.

I do not know how many clippings of the newspaper reports you have read, but I must tell you that all reports written by Canadian journalists were very favourable, and what I call sensible, because they saw the futility of trying to prevent the emergence of a force as inevitable and as honest as what you and me are fighting to accomplish. Negroes here, mainly Canadian native Negroes are rather inactive on these matters since they have not been bitten openly and as savagely as Negroes in the USA. But recently, there has been an influx of West Indian Negroes who, accustomed to a different way of life in the Islands, have spoken out for rights which they felt were being denied them. The situation is rather better, with opportunities for more or less decent jobs and better housing facilities. And all this has changed since 1955 ~~XXXXXX~~ when I came up as a student. And if like you, people did not jeer at me, at least they did not embrace me; and ~~YEM~~ as you so cryptically put it, "It was not a happy occasion" and there has been "no conversation".

My main concern is that you retain this sanity which you have displayed so admirably; and that your family remain as superb as they have been throughout the entire situation. I cannot hope to put myself in your place, for that place is reserved only for someone as brave, and I repeat brave, and sure as you. But I do think that I can judge the discomfort and the

difficulty it must be for you to settle down and study, which after all, is one of the important motives for going to the University of Mississippi.

Incidentally, I am two years older than you. But I feel younger. And I feel that I know you very well. It would amuse you to know that since your admission to the University, I have had to buy very/drinks in the pub I frequent. Every night when I//few go in, strangers, and all of them white, have been buying me drinks; and people have been very "nice" on the streets. But I must tell you that I am very, very very proud of you; and I feel that you are my brother, because, probably, the reports of your father's determination to see his children get an education and what are theirs by the fact of being born, and not dropped out of somewhere by a miracle, corresponds to my mother's insistence that I should not suffer what she suffered through lack of formal education and other opportunities taken for granted by the others.

I would be very delighted if you could find some time, sometime (there is no hurry) to write me now and again. I am not writing this to you as a ~~xxx~~ sermon, but rather as a letter to a friend. When my book comes out, I will send you a copy, initialled, and I hope you will be able to find time to read, in spite of the heavy course of studies which you have embarked on, and in spite also of the pressures of your family life.

This letter does not come from me only, but from all West Indians living in Canada, and particularly those who have been educated at Canadian universities.

With best regards, and best luck in your studies. And I hope the time will come soon, when I will meet you and be able to have a talk with you on matters in which both of us seem to have similar views. But most of all, I trust you can devote some time to your studies. Give our regards to your wife and your family.

Yours sincerely,

Austin

Austin Clarke